



# News Release

Pat Quinn, Governor

Jay Rowell, Director

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## **IDES Chosen for Veteran Employment Initiative** *Army UCX to Use Social Media to Drive Vet Job Search*

**CHICAGO** – Federal officials looking to engage younger Veterans and quickly return them to civilian employment chose to pay for an innovative social media program by the Illinois Department of Employment Security. The pilot program could become a best-practices model to be used nationwide.

Dubbed [Army UCX](#), the program emphasizes social media channels to connect Veterans with IDES employment services and the state's help-wanted job board, [Illinoisjoblink.com](http://Illinoisjoblink.com). Recently discharged Veterans qualify for unemployment insurance and the federally designated UCX acronym indicates Unemployment Compensation Ex-Military.

"Illinois has a good story to tell regarding Veterans and work. The Veteran unemployment rate in Illinois is below the civilian rate and lower than the national rate," IDES Director Jay Rowell said. "However, the unemployment rate among young Gulf War II Veterans is unacceptably high across our nation. That is why we must find new ways to convey to Veterans that it is OK to ask for help. Army UCX guides Veterans to our door so we can personalize a service plan that meets the needs of that specific Veteran and their family."

IDES is charged with delivering re-employment services to Veterans and helped 17,000 Veterans find meaningful employment last year. The Veteran unemployment rate in Illinois is lower than the national rate. In 2012, the state rate was 6.8 percent and the national rate was 7.0 percent. Nationwide, however, the unemployment rate for Gulf War II Veterans between the ages of 18 and 24 is significantly higher at 20.4 percent. A comparable state rate is not available.

"Illinois' selection for this pilot program is encouraging – as well as indicative of the innovative support that Governor Quinn's administration has consistently provided to our Veterans," said Erica Borggren, Director of the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs. "IDES' work to target its outreach and employment toward newly returning Veterans is tremendously important and can make a real difference to Veterans struggling to transition to civilian employment."

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There are anecdotal reasons why young Gulf II Veterans have greater difficulty obtaining civilian employment. Chief among them is the lack of civilian work and work-search support structure before enlisting. Not having a successful experience looking for work prior to their military service creates barriers not found in other job candidates. The inability to translate military experience to a civilian position widens the employment gap. Finally, once a Veteran returns to the United States, the more time taken before launching a civilian work search, the lesser the likelihood that employment will be obtained.

Illinois' \$700,000, two-year program will test the emerging theory that using social media to more quickly and frequently engage Veterans will lead to shorter readjustment times and fewer weeks collecting unemployment insurance. Central to this theory is that these young Veterans do not readily embrace the fraternal organizations of prior military generations, such as the posts affiliated with the American Legion or Veterans of Foreign Wars. The inherent support system natural to such organizations also provided a proven employment network. While young Veterans are not inclined to use fraternal services, they are likely to engage in social media platforms because they did so prior to deployment.

Veterans can access personalized UCX service through [Illinoisjoblink.com](http://Illinoisjoblink.com). The state's hiring board features more than 120,000 help-wanted ads. Job seekers can build multiple resumes to emphasize different skills and experiences. Business owners can use keyword matching technology to search resumes and find the best candidate. Illinoisjoblink.com is free at the website and at (877) 342-7533.

Illinois was chosen because it was among the first states to propose a comprehensive outreach strategy built around social media. Although social media channels have been key components of private-sector campaigns, the tool remains relatively new to the military's hierarchical structure that benefits greatly from tradition and personal communication and whose leaders were not exposed to the technology when they entered the service. Army UCX is in line with other Illinois and IDES efforts, including:

**The Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR)** in 2012 named IDES the first workforce agency in the country to sign a statement of support reaffirming the critical role that Guard and Reserve soldiers serve in securing our nation's freedom. The ESGR is part of our nation's Department of Defense.

**The American Legion** named Illinois' Bloomington office as the best provider of employment services to Veterans in 2012. The award was presented in August 2013 at the American Legion's 95<sup>th</sup> national convention in Houston, Texas. IDES was the only agency nationwide to receive this honor.

**The Hiring Veterans Tax Credit** provides a business up to a \$5,000 tax credit for each unemployed Veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan. It also honors Gold Star families by making them eligible for the same property tax relief available in some communities to the families of fallen firefighters and police officers.

**Veteran Hiring Events** use [illinoisjoblink.com](http://illinoisjoblink.com) to pre-screen attendees. The process enabled employers to hire 150 Veterans *during* an event earlier this year.

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